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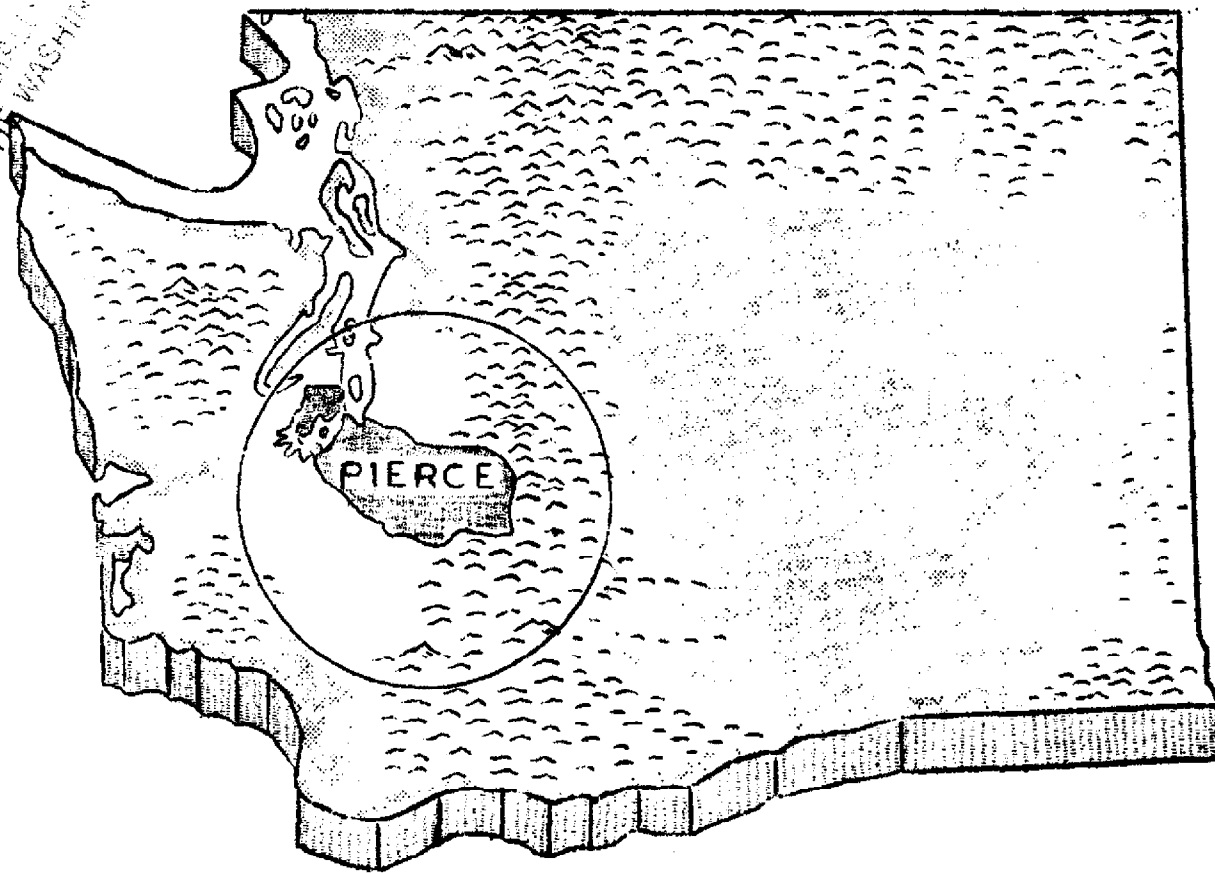
# PIERCE COUNTY AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON

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COUNTY AGRICULTURAL DATA SERIES  
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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Sverre N. Omdahl, Director

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Agricultural Marketing Service  
S. R. Newell

WASHINGTON CROP AND LIVESTOCK REPORTING SERVICE  
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## FOREWORD

This book on Pierce County is one of an original series being devoted to the history and present nature of agriculture in each of the thirty-nine counties of the State of Washington.

County agricultural data books are intended to serve a variety of needs. Continually changing conditions in a dynamic state such as Washington require constant planning by groups and individuals both in private enterprise and public service. Comprehensive knowledge of land resources, population, and agricultural-economic trends in a local area such as Pierce County is of great value. This book will be useful for reference in public and private instruction by social studies teachers in Pierce County schools. It has been devised also to inform adults interested in knowing more about their immediate area, as well as persons and enterprises concerned with agricultural production and marketing or prospective settlement and investment in the county.

Carefully selected geographic facts, agricultural history, population trends and statistical data are included to give an over-all appreciation of Pierce County. The enumerations of the United States Censuses of Population and Agriculture since 1860 and recent estimates of the Washington State Census Board are summarized to give a perspective of development since the establishment of Pierce County in 1852. Facts on topography, soil, climate and forests which influence farming are integrated from surveys and reports of government agencies. Estimates of leading crops by years since 1939 by the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service provide a measure of the trend in the agriculture of the county farm industry.

Acknowledgment is accorded the professional work of several persons. Immediate direction was under Emery C. Wilcox, Agricultural Statistician in Charge, Estimates Division, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture. Supervision, research and cartographic illustration was performed by Dr. Woodrow R. Clevinger, Market Analyst, Washington State Department of Agriculture. Mr. Richard Perry, of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and Bruce H. Graham, Robert McGregor, and Christian A. Stokstad, Agricultural Statisticians, Agricultural Marketing Service, United States Department of Agriculture, gave valuable assistance. Vladimir Kovalik, University of Washington graduate student in geography, compiled most of the statistical tables and graphs. The clerical staff of the Washington Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, under supervision of Miss Phyllis C. Robinson, prepared tabular material for the book.

Olympia, Washington  
July 1, 1956.

Sverre N. Omdahl, Director  
Washington State Department of Agriculture

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## PART I

## History of Pierce County Agriculture

Introduction

Pierce County, a land of Puget Sound shores, glaciated plains and the high Cascades of the Mount Rainier region, is located in southwestern Washington. Its land area is 1,680 square miles, or approximately 1,075,200 acres. It is nineteenth in size among the thirty-nine Washington counties, and is larger than the State of Rhode Island. The Hudson's Bay Fur Company developed the earliest agriculture on Puget Sound in this area in 1839. With a good location for marketing in the metropolitan sections of western Washington, the lowland valley areas of Pierce County have been developed for important poultry, dairying, vegetable, berry and other specialty farming industries.

Typical of most counties on the Pacific Coast, Pierce has grown in population, in numbers of farms and in volume of crop and livestock production. New settlers and many industrial workers have been attracted by land and employment opportunities. Since the first census in 1860 when it had 1,115 persons, the population has grown to an estimated 300,800 in 1955, ranking second among Washington counties. During this period the value of farm land and buildings and the productivity of the land have increased greatly. In 1954 Pierce County ranked fourteenth in the state in value of all farm products sold, and its farmers sold products worth an estimated \$12,139,819 during that year.

History 1/

The Oregon Territorial Legislature created Pierce County December 22, 1852, shortly before Washington Territory was created by Congress in 1853. It was named in honor of Franklin Pierce, fourteenth President of the United States (1852-1856). The county seat was established first at Steilacoom, then later moved to Tacoma.

The history of western civilization in Pierce County begins with the explorations of the British in 1792, when an expedition under Captain George Vancouver explored Puget Sound. Second Lieutenant Peter Puget, under Vancouver's

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command, was dispatched during May 1792 in a boat to explore the islands and inlets of present Pierce County. Features of the area, such as Puget Sound and Mount Rainier, were named by the Vancouver expedition in honor of Royal Navy officers.

The exploring party of Peter Puget made the first known white contacts with the Indians. Three main Indian groups using the Coast Salish language were found living on southern Puget Sound shores and rivers. The Nisquallies lived in the valley of the Nisqually River. Another river group were the Puyallups in the northern section of the county. The inlets and islands of Puget Sound in the western section were inhabited by the Squaxon Indians living in villages on the beaches and river banks. They practiced no agriculture and subsisted by fishing, hunting, and plant and berry gathering. As white settlement increased they remained friendly and were active in fur trading. Many worked as paid laborers in the employ of early white farm settlers. In 1859, Governor Stevens of Washington Territory concluded a treaty (The Medicine Creek Treaty) on the Nisqually River with the Nisquallies, Puyallups and Squaxon. Reservations were set aside in the Puyallup and Nisqually Valleys. The Nisquallies and Puyallups started some livestock farming and potato farming as early as 1840, having learned the rudiments of agriculture from the Hudson's Bay Fur Company.

One of the earliest and largest farming operations in Washington history was established in the present Pierce County area by the British. In conjunction with its fur trade at Fort Nisqually, founded in 1833, the Hudson's Bay Company formed the Puget's Sound Agricultural Company in 1839. Operated similar to a large livestock ranch, nearly all the low prairie land between the Nisqually and Puyallup Rivers was used as a range. Managed by Dr. William F. Tolmie, the operation covered about one-third of present Pierce County. The company raised beef cattle, oxen, horses and sheep and some hay, grain and potatoes. During the 1840's livestock was exported from Steilacoom for the California trade and the Russian market in Alaska. New settlers in the Puget Sound area also procured livestock, produce and seed from this ranch. American settlement in the Puget Sound area was discouraged by the Hudson's Bay Company. Land disputes and British jurisdiction and land titles were removed by the treaty of 1846 which established the present Canadian border at the 49th parallel. The U. S. Army took over Fort Nisqually and Hudson's Bay Company buildings and farm holdings. By 1850 American settlement proceeded without dispute in the Nisqually and Puyallup Valleys and on the Spanaway and Yelm prairies, formerly Hudson's Bay Company farm land.

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1/ This historical summary has been derived from four sources:

- (1) Bonney, W. P., The History of Pierce County, Washington. 2 Volumes, 1927.
- (2) Writers' Program, WPA. Washington, A Guide to the Evergreen State. Binfords and Mort. Portland, Oregon, 1941.
- (3) Perry, Richard M., The Counties of Washington. Olympia, Secretary of State, State of Washington, 1943. (Mimeographed).
- (4) The Tacoma News Tribune, Tacoma, Washington. Washington's Territorial Centennial Edition, April 7, 1953.

Possibly the earliest American land settler in Pierce County was David J. Chambers. In defiance of Hudson's Bay Company protests, he settled on Chambers Creek near Steilacoom in 1845. LaFayette Balch and some other Americans founded Steilacoom in 1851, the first incorporated town in the state. The Tacoma and Commencement Bay area was first settled by a Swedish sawmill man, Nicholas DeLin in 1852. Lumber from his small mill was shipped to San Francisco. Town settlement at Tacoma got underway in 1864, when Job Carr homesteaded the site in that year. General Morton M. McCarver, anticipating Tacoma as an important railroad terminus, purchased Carr's homestead and other lands and did much to promote growth of the city after 1865.

Settlement in the interior, remote from Puget Sound, proceeded slowly after an early start. The Indian War of 1855-56 caused inland settlers to move to Steilacoom and Fort Nisqually for safety. Although the Nisqually and Puyallup Indians were mostly friendly, some of them joined the Yakima Confederacy which sent war parties across the Cascades in 1855 for attacks on Puget Sound settlements, and the Indian raids in the wooded interior of Pierce County did not stop until after 1856.

In 1853 a sizeable immigrant party of 36 wagons, led by James Longmire, came across the Cascade Mountains at Naches Pass. They settled on donation land claims on Spanaway and Yelm prairies along Chambers, Clover and Muck Creeks - an area which was previously a grazing range of the British Puget Sound Agricultural Company. These lands were less fertile than the Puyallup and Nisqually River bottomlands, but they were open grass lands and were much less difficult to clear than the heavy forests along the rivers.

The rich valley lands of the lower Puyallup River - the Puyallup-Sumner area - were settled during the 1854-1870 period. Ezra Meeker, an outstanding figure in early Pierce County agriculture, platted the townsite of Puyallup in 1877. The enterprise of Meeker and other early farmers made the Puyallup Valley a leading hop growing area from 1870 to 1890. Hundreds of acres were grown for Puget Sound and San Francisco markets. Large numbers of Puyallup and other Puget Sound Indians were hired to harvest the crop.

The higher, interior Cascade foothill and mountain valleys were homesteaded between 1880 and 1910. A group of Swedish immigrants took up land in the Ohop Valley in the Eatonville area. The town of Eatonville was founded on the trail to Mount Rainier by T. C. Van Eaton. German immigrants, led by Vincent Rotter and Rudolph Kolb, were the first homesteaders in the valley and benchlands of the upper Nisqually River in the Alder, Elba and Ashford communities, Elbe being named after the Elbe River in Germany.

The scenic wilderness area of Mount Rainier was explored as early as 1833 by the Hudson's Bay Company official and botanist, William F. Tolmie. James Longmire was the most prominent settler in the Mount Rainier area. He homesteaded the Longmire Springs locality in 1883, built a trail to the springs, and operated a resort there for several years. Early tourist trade to the mountain aided the farmers in the isolated area. Mount Rainier was established as a national park in 1899. The expenditures of the Federal and state governments for roads and facilities for Mount Rainier tourists provided much part-time employment for settlers on eastern Pierce County lands.

Settlement was relatively slow between 1860 and 1880 but increased rapidly between 1880 and 1920 as railroads, lumbering and mining expanded the economy of the county. The growth of Tacoma as a lumber center began in 1869 when San Francisco businessmen established the Hanson and Ackerman Mill. In 1873 the Northern Pacific Railway line from Kalama on the Columbia River reached Tacoma. Railroad spurs were extended to the coal field in the hills of northeastern Pierce County, in the South Prairie, Buckley, Wilkeson and Carbonado localities. The mining industry brought in large groups of laborers prior to 1920. Coal was shipped by rail to Tacoma for loading on ships. Many western and central European immigrants came to work in the mines, some of whom took up land. In 1887 the Northern Pacific Railway was completed over the Cascade Mountains and down the Puyallup Valley to Tacoma, giving the area good transcontinental service to the East. In 1909 the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway reached Tacoma, providing another transcontinental rail service.

New railways caused rapid growth of lumbering, flour milling and food processing in Pierce County. About 87,000,000 feet of lumber was cut in Tacoma in 1887. The St. Paul and Tacoma Lumber Company purchased about 80,000 acres of timberland in the interior of the county. As the railways and logging operations of this company and other lumber concerns proceeded inland toward the mountains, a large number of the loggers and mill-workers purchased cut-over land for part-time farming near their places of work.

While it was primarily based on lumber manufacturing, the economy of the county became more diversified by other payrolls and development of specialized agriculture. Industrialization was the main influence which expanded the population of Pierce County from a few thousand in 1880 to over 114,000 in 1920. During the World War I period, the Tacoma smelter of the American Smelting and Refining Company added to industrial employment. During the First World War, a large military reservation, Fort Lewis, was established which provided construction employment as well as a good market for farm products. Later, there was also much construction work for hydro-electric dams and highways in the Cascade Mountains and for facilities in Mount Rainier National Park.

Pierce County continued to grow but at a slower rate from 1920 to 1955. United States Army and Air Force expenditures at Fort Lewis and McChord Field and World War II shipbuilding all brought in new non-farm population. Population grew at the rate of about 8,000 per year during the period of 1940 to 1955. The rural-farm population also grew during this period as a result of greatly increased local markets and settlement on small suburban farms.

Investments in food processing and the active work by growers and marketing associations in the Tacoma, Puyallup and Sumner localities were important in developing Pierce County agriculture. The Puyallup Valley became a center of agricultural research, experimentation and promotion. The Western Washington Experiment Station of Washington State College, located near Puyallup, helped in developing new varieties of berries and improved methods of dairying and poultry raising for all western Washington.

The Western Washington Fair at Puyallup, through its annual exhibits, created much interest in local agriculture. Private associations and companies improved the marketing of a greater variety of specialized crops such as bulbs, berries and vegetables. These include the Puget Sound Vegetable Growers and Rhubarb Growers Associations. Through the influence of the numerous new canning and freezing companies in the area, agriculture has become more and more specialized.